Gendering Demilitarisation and Justice in Northern Ireland

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Research Highlights and Abstract
This article:

- Exposes how masculinised accounts of conflict transformational processes in Northern Ireland have distorted the historical record of the region's on-going transition from violent conflict.
- Assesses the theoretical and practical effects of de-gendering the analysis of conflict transformational processes in the region.
- Provides an empirical study of women's hidden contribution to the reduction of levels of paramilitary violence in ethnically divided, working-class communities in the region.
- Utilises focus group data to develop a gender-sensitive reading of community justice, security and peace.

The 1998 Peace Agreement in Northern Ireland provoked local-level processes of demilitarisation that focused on developing community-based restorative justice practices to replace paramilitary forms of justice. These schemes were viewed as important aspects of the broader process of conflict transformation in the region. The dominant narrative surrounding the development of these new justice forms framed them as an outcome of the efforts of ex-combatant men. This article contests this narrative and examines women's contribution to the development of CBRJ in Northern Ireland. Using data from focus groups, the article exposes the consequences of displacing women in conflict transformational analysis. Additionally, it explores how women's articulation of their conflict transformational practices engenders a critical reframing of key terms in conflict transformational narratives including peace, security, and justice. This exploration reinforces wider feminist claims that any analysis of conflict transformational processes that displaces gender is both conceptually and politically problematic.

International feminist scholarship continues to highlight the political, institutional, and cultural obstacles to women's participation in peace-building activities.[1] In Northern Ireland, a women's party, in the form of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC), participated in the multi-party political talks that led to the Peace Agreement in 1998.[2] The NIWC secured the inclusion of 'the right of women to full and equal political participation' in the list of human rights in the final draft of the Agreement. They also championed the establishment of a 'gender balanced' Civic Forum that was intended to act as a consultative mechanism on social, economic and cultural issues. However, the Civic Forum was suspended in 2002 and

multi-party negotiations since the 1998 Agreement have been dominated by men (see Ward 2013).

While there has been a narrowing of women's ability to shape macro-level processes of conflict transformation since 1998, the Agreement also generated local-level peace-building initiatives. For example, conflict transformational strategies emerged that were concerned with supporting processes of demilitarisation at the community level. Community-based restorative justice (CBRJ) has been one of the most discussed and controversial 'bottom up' peace-building initiatives to emerge in Northern Ireland. In contrast to the 'top down' negotiations that led to the 1998 and 2007 Agreements,[3] CBRJ was located at the level of community; an arena where women in Northern Ireland have been highly active. However, men's work in this arena became the focus of debates around CBRJ and some mainstream scholars viewed ex-combatant men's CBRJ work as a vital ingredient in the conflict transformational process.

While critics have raised concerns about the integrity of the schemes, advocates of CBRJ have claimed that the schemes have provided a model of local-level peace-building that can inform international peace-building practices. However, the story of the development of CBRJ that has been exported internationally is highly gendered. Political and scholarly evaluations of the schemes have portrayed CBRJ as an outcome of the skills and leadership that ex-combatant men developed through their experiences of violence and imprisonment during the conflict. Ashe (2009) challenged this narrative at a theoretical level, and argued that the exclusive focus on men and their experiences had rendered women's contribution to the development of CBRJ invisible. This article utilises empirical data generated through focus groups conducted with women who work in CBRJ to make women present in analyses of local-level conflict transformational work in the region. It begins by examining the gendered mechanisms through which both proponents and opponents of the schemes rendered women's positioning and contribution to the development of CBRJ invisible and exposes how the debates on gender that emerged around CBRJ were framed by ethno-nationalist concerns. To challenge claims that CBRJ was an effect of men's skills, knowledge and activities it makes visible how women utilised their skills, knowledge and experiences of the conflict to develop a model of CBRJ practice in their communities. Moreover, it highlights how their local-level conflict transformation work is underpinned by gender sensitive conceptions of peace, justice and security.

Conflict Transformation and Community Justice

Northern Ireland experienced over 30 years of ethno-nationalist conflict. A range of factors, most notably the announcement of paramilitary ceasefires in 1994 created the conditions that led to the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (1998) (see Smyth 2004). This Agreement negotiated between the ethno-nationalist political parties set out a framework for a power-sharing devolved assembly and addressed issues such as the institutional reform of policing. Policing reform was an emotive dimension of conflict transformation, requiring several years of post-Agreement political bargaining (Mulcahy 2006; see also Tonge 2004). The contours of the Northern Ireland conflict had resulted in a police force that was overwhelmingly protestant

and engaged in 'maintaining a disputed constitutional space' (Ellison 2007, 248). Moreover, 'its "war" with the Irish Republican Army (IRA) meant that it engaged in a number of activities allied to its counterinsurgency role, which had a disproportionate impact on the Catholic and nationalist community as a whole' (Ellison 2007, 248). Accusations of collusion between members of the RUC and loyalist paramilitaries that led to a number of official inquiries deepened perceptions among sections of the Catholic and Irish nationalist community that the RUC had always been a partisan force (see Cain Web Service 2014). These problems created a policing vacuum in nationalist communities. Loyalists perceived the RUC as a legitimate but ineffectual police force, leading to the development of paramilitary forms of community justice in Loyalist communities (Winston 1997). Physical beatings, shootings and the exiling of individuals from communities were used by paramilitary groups to police both communities (see McEvoy and Mika 2001, 2002; Mitchell 2008). 'Anti-social' behaviour by young men made them the central targets of paramilitary justice (McEvoy and Mika 2002).

During 1998/1999 and 2004/2005, over 1,800 paramilitary-style assaults and shootings were recorded in Northern Ireland (Mika 2006, 11). From 1999 community restorative work started to emerge as an alternative method for dealing with community justice issues. Both Loyalist and Irish Republican ex-combatant men began the process of building structures to facilitate the development of restorative justice practices in highly politicised and economically disadvantaged working-class areas of Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. Loyalists developed Northern Ireland Alternatives (NIA), while Irish Republicans developed Community Restorative Justice Ireland (CRJI). Given the broader non-violent ethics of community-based restorative solutions, it seemed a viable and positive alternative to paramilitary punishments. Between 2003 and 2006, Mika's (2006, 43) research suggests that CRJI project activity stopped 82 per cent of potential paramilitary punishments in its impact area, the comparable figure for NIA was 71 per cent.

Despite such positive evaluations, the role of former male combatants in the development of the schemes led to accusations that they represented a continuation of paramilitary control of community justice by other means. The Independent Monitoring Commission Report (2007) stated that the Commission had received information that community restorative justice was 'being invoked as a means of continuing to exert paramilitary control within communities' (Mika 2006, 50). While the schemes are now well established, CBRJ practice remains controversial.

Gender, Power and Community Justice

Local-level forms of conflict transformation such as community-based restorative justice should be more accessible for women because of the predominance of women in community work (O'Rourke 2009, 271). Analyses that have explored women's utilisation of CBRJ in the conflict transformational period have shown how women can use this justice form to engage in peace-building while also bringing issues about women's security and rights to light (Snyder 2004). However, in the Northern Ireland context women's role in CBRJ was ignored and it was framed as a male arena of practice.

This framing led to feminists becoming concerned about the effects of men's dominance over new forms of community justice on women's positioning within those communities (Ashe 2009; O'Rourke 2009). Additionally, mainstream theorists represented men's development of CBRJ as evidence of a shift in the political subjectivities of ex-combatant men away from violent solutions to conflict toward non-violent models of conflict resolution (see Ashe, 2009 for overview). Men's dominance in developing the schemes raised issues about the impact of men's standpoints on the processes and values of CBRJ practice which reflected broader concerns about maintenance of the inequitable gender relationships in ethnonationalist communities that were often reinforced by the conflict. In some contexts, the processes associated with restorative justice, such as dialogue, mediation and restoration do not prevent the values of restorative justice from becoming saturated with regulatory gendered norms (see Daly and Stubbs 2006).

As feminist critics of the formal criminal justice system have argued, the law in modern Western societies reflects the subjectivity of the dominant, white, adult male (Hudson 2006, 30; see also Smart 1989; Naffine 1990; MacKinnon 1991), and there is no guarantee that restorative practices will not reproduce male-centric justice forms. Subsequently, men's early domination of CBRJ in Northern Ireland raised concerns that the gender bias of the criminal justice system could be reproduced, albeit through different processes, in restorative practices. Allegations that CRJI had been involved in telling young women to end affairs with married men (SDLP 2006) raised the spectre of the potential for CBRJ practices to reinforce traditional gendered norms within communities which, at times during the period of conflict, led to the policing of women's sexual behaviour (see Aretxaga 1995a and 1997). However, the real gendered composition of restorative justice schemes remained hidden because those who evaluated CBRJ work gave little attention to gender; it was not considered conceptually relevant.

Ethno-gendered Exclusions

While there was no explicit analysis of gender equality issues in mainstream evaluations of CBRJ, those evaluations were saturated with gendered narratives (Ashe 2009; O'Rourke 2009). These narratives were provoked by debates around the integrity and boundaries of the schemes. While the schemes were focused on replacing the paramilitary policing of anti-social behaviour by young men to facilitate demilitarisation at the community level, reports emerged that some of the schemes had engaged with cases of sexual and domestic violence (see O'Rourke 2009). In the context of societies that have not experienced ethno-nationalist violence, the application of restorative solutions to cases of domestic and sexual violence remains problematic. As Daly and Stubbs (2006, 3) observe: 'Although some feminists saw mediation as compatible with feminist values, it continues to be controversial in some contexts. For example, it has been criticised for defining battering (and other offences) as "disputes", for pushing reconciliation, easing victimisation, and limiting (formal) justice options.'

Given the gendered division of political and social power within working-class communities in the region (see Ashe 2007; McDowell 2008; Ward 2013; Stapleton and Wilson 2014) and the problems that a militarised culture and a lack of police

legitimacy in Irish nationalist communities had created for women reporting domestic and sexual abuse (McWilliams and McKiernan 1993) the management of restorative 'solutions' to these crimes by organisations dominated by ex-combatant men has been even more controversial in Northern Ireland. For example, claims were made by women's groups that CRJI would only refer cases to Women's Aid if they were given an undertaking that these cases would not be referred to the police (SDLP 2006, 8) Reflecting broader feminist concerns about the suitability of restorative solutions in cases of sexual and domestic abuse the Belfast Rape Crisis Centre and Foyle Women's Aid located in Derry City voiced opposition to the schemes dealing with incidences of sexual and domestic abuse (O'Rourke 2009, 279).

O'Rourke (2009) made the charge that critics of the schemes had appropriated the concerns raised by these women's groups to challenge the broader integrity of the schemes. Generally, sexual and domestic violence are rarely placed at the forefront of public political debate by the main political parties. Yet, in the context of the development of CBRJ, as O'Rourke (2009, 279–280) notes, these concerns were seized upon by political parties opposed to CBRJ and were 'used as a political football (and) manipulated by political parties for their own ends'. Women's human rights issues subsequently became integrated into on-going ethno-nationalist antagonisms surrounding the power of ex-combatants in nationalist communities and also broader political struggles around the integrity of the police force and the effectiveness of the criminal justice system (see McEvoy and Mika 2002). Conversely, advocates of the schemes dismissed these accusations which, in effect, meant that issues relating to the effect of CBRJ on women were filtered out of critical discussions of CBRJ in Northern Ireland (see O'Rourke 2009 for further analysis of these mechanisms).

Narratives of Masculinities

While some narratives represented women as the potential victims of community-based restorative justice and others enclosed gendered concerns within the discursive framework of debates surrounding the schemes' integrity, narratives also emerged that represented the men involved in developing those schemes as the new peace-builders (see Ashe 2009). Traditionally in Northern Ireland, peace-building has been an under-valued arena of female practice (see Roulston 1997). According to a number of mainstream analysts, rather than disqualifying men from engagement in peace-building, a history of violence made men more likely to reject violence in the conflict transformational period (see Ashe 2009, 304). Additionally, these analysts argued men's unique experiences of participation in physical force violence and incarceration in prison provided them with the skills and standpoint required to take up leadership roles in delivering non-violent justice forms at the community level (see Ashe 2009). For example, men's resistance against the prison authorities during incarceration and their engagement in prisoner-led educational activities were interpreted as providing men with resilience, creativity, and the strong analytical and negotiation skills required to build CBRJ and persuade 'initially sceptical communities' that restorative justice was a viable alternative to paramilitary justice forms (see Ashe 2009, 304–6). Theorists concluded that due to their distinctive experiences and skills-set these men were well placed to take on the moral leadership of their communities (Ashe 2009, 306).

The narrative, unintentionally, re-privileged men's leadership roles in the context of conflict transformation and positioned men's experiences of the conflict as the foundations upon which CBRJ was built. However, this narrative about transitional masculinities also suggested that men had colonised this arena of conflict transformation only because scholars ignored the real presence of women in delivering these new justice forms. However, the ex-combatant men who built the structures of CBRJ quickly utilised women's extensive expertise of community work and their experiential knowledge of community issues. Without women's involvement in the schemes, it is unlikely that CBRJ could have been effective. Recognising women's hidden involvement in these schemes opens a further set of analytical questions about CBRJ practice. Analysing how women understand their activities within this complex space engenders a reframing of a range of complex transformational issues including peace, justice and security, and exposes the continuing difficulties that women face in communities emerging from violent conflict.

Women, CBRJ and Peace-building

The women who participated in the research worked in CBRJ in Irish republican/ nationalist/catholic communities in either a paid or voluntary capacity. 7 women participated in 3 ninety-minute focus groups in spring 2012. All research participants had deep communal identifications. The focus groups explored 5 themes: experiences of the conflict; routes to CBRJ work; gender organisational structures; security and violence; and impediments to practice. The focus groups were not recorded at the participants' request and each was assigned a number to protect their anonymity.

The study participants engaged in intercommunity events that examined, for example, domestic violence, but expressed a preference for working within their own ethno-nationalist communities. While the research participants do not work through an explicit feminist narrative and do not frame their work around cross-community women's issues agendas, the focus group material exposed how their framing of their restorative justice work disrupts mainstream representations of CBRJ and disturbs male-centric formulations of peace, justice and security.

Deconstructing Male-centric Accounts of CBRJ

Women's accounts of their CBRJ roles deconstruct the valorisation of conflict transitional masculinities in CBRJ literature and challenge claims that CBRJ practice was the outcome of a unique set of men's skills and experiences. The research participants confirmed that Irish Republican men had built the structures for CBRJ and noted that this was not surprising given that the Irish Republican movement is dominated by men. However, those men quickly utilised the existing infrastructure of community work developed by the women in their communities. Several of the women had a long history of community activism while others had worked in health and social care. The research participants highlighted how, during the worst years of the conflict, several had organised or joined groups concerned with a range of socio-economic issues through involvement with local voluntary groups such as

Citizens Advice, the Falls Community Council and the West Belfast Socio-Economic Forum. The research participants described these organisations as mainly composed of women volunteers who were concerned about a range of socio-economic problems in their communities.

The research participants explained how their involvement in voluntary work emanated from perceptions that the statutory agencies were failing to address their communities' socio-economic needs. Several of the women said that they had 'fought' the statutory agencies' definitions of community need and engaged in community campaigns to redefine local needs and to persuade government agencies to meet those needs. The women involved in these campaigns recalled how at community meetings with statutory agencies women from the communities whose needs were being discussed were not allowed to speak. Community volunteers created their own spaces to discuss these issues and women were at the forefront of those debates. Participant 3 stated that:

> Representatives of the community groups were talking about the need for local council funding for facilities such as play parks and to address issues related to social housing. Through these meetings, there was a feeling that the community groups were not being listened to and that the community did not have a say in provision, the whole community was frustrated. Representatives of the community groups were talking about the need for local council funding for facilities such as play parks and to address issues related to social housing.

Several of the women had taken part in campaigns around these issues. Mainstream researchers have highlighted how, while incarcerated, men resisted the prison authorities through, for example, speaking Irish, thereby forging practices of resistance that they would later utilise in the development of CBRJ (see Ashe 2009). The focus group material illustrates how, at this time, some women were engaging in different forms of resistance that involved challenging and holding statutory agencies to account for their failings in the area of social provision. While men expanded their knowledge and creativity through prisoner-led study, women expanded their knowledge and creativity through the processes of diagnosing community needs, articulating those needs and developing solutions to meet those needs. Through these activities, they built up the skills and capacities that they later utilised in CBRJ practice while also building up their own formal educational qualifications.

The conflict had a substantial impact on communities, often exacerbating existing socio-economic problems. Feminist research in Northern Ireland has documented how the problems created by the conflict provoked women's political activism across a range of 'bread and butter' issues (McWilliams 1995; see also Coulter 1993; Roulston 1997). The impact of ethno-nationalist violence and the effects of socio-economic deprivation were also identified as motivators for community activism by the research participants. Perceptions of political and social inequalities between communities had also encouraged women's activism, particularly in the Irish nationalist community (see Coulter 1993; McWilliams 1995; Aretxaga 1995a, 1997). The impact of years of violent conflict on family life in Northern Ireland was often a driver of women's political and community activism. Some of the research

participants spoke directly about the impact of the conflict on their involvement in community work. Participant 1 described women's community activism as a result of the 'harm and hurt' that the ethnic conflict had created for deprived communities.

The effects of the conflict on the level and breadth of women's community activism meant that women could transit easily into community restorative justice work. To engage effectively as CBRJ workers, women combined informal knowledge with formal qualifications in the area of CBRJ. The study participants had gained a range of qualifications, including degrees and diplomas. Importantly, they perceived themselves as having a broad knowledge of community needs but they also understood themselves as highly trained and experienced professionals. This indicates a degree of resistance against any residual status within conflict transformational work.

While the research participants recognised men's role in developing CBRJ, they perceived their knowledge and practice as vital to the success of CBRJ. Participant 2 stated that: 'On the ground women pushed community-based restorative justice through. At the organisational level men dominate, at the community level women dominate. At the community level women have been doing all the work!' Moreover, the research participants recognised that the hierarchy of CBRJ was predominantly, although not exclusively, male. They recalled how men took centre stage in the initial presentations of the objectives and practices of the schemes to the community while women acted as 'accompaniments' to the men by providing a case study. Moreover, they recalled that the majority of people in the audience at those initial presentations were women and this reflected the impact of the difficulties surrounding policing, security and justice on women's lives. While they detailed the gender dimensions that marked the 'rolling out' of CBRJ in Northern Ireland, the research participants demonstrated little interest in the continuing dominance of men in the organisation's senior management team. When asked if they felt there were barriers to women permeating the higher levels of the organisation, all of the women agreed that 'it was not really an issue' for them because they were not interested in working at that level. They maintained that they wanted to work closely with their communities. As senior managers were not 'hands on', this was a disincentive for the women to push for senior management positions.

Moreover, none of the research participants detailed any direct gender discrimination in terms of opportunities for promotion within the organisation, and they pointed out that a woman had joined the senior management team. Feminist research suggests that scholars cannot assume that these preferences are simply an outcome of autonomous choice or an effect of the differential gendered experiences of conflict, as mainstream commentators suggest in their analysis of CBRJ. These preferences are structured through the historical relationships of gender in Northern Ireland society which produced and reproduced men's dominance of political and social life. The gendered hierarchies of CBRJ are reflective of men's dominance of public/political life in Northern Ireland more generally.

At a more immediate level, the research participants did address the issue of gendered power differentials in CBRJ in more detail when they stressed the impor-

tance of communication between from the community workers and the senior management team, and they highlighted their desire to influence the shape of CBRJ from their standpoints as community-level staff. With such a sharp gendered division between community-level workers and the senior management of the schemes, it seems imperative that CBRJ schemes implement clear structures to channel women's views on the shape and direction of these organisations. A proactive policy that encompasses a clear and structured strategy in relation to this issue would not only support the work of women in CBRJ, but would also represent an acknowledgement of the need to find creative ways to address the positioning of men and women in different spheres of practice within the organisation.

Gendering Transitions to CBRJ

Much has been written about the transition of some ex-combatants from paramilitary forms of justice towards non-violence models in the form of CBRJ. The stereotype of women as apolitical peacemakers suggests that, because CBRJ is based around a non-violent methodology, it would be attractive to women. However, feminist research inside and outside the region has exposed the fact that gendered subjectivities do not conform to stereotypical ideas about women's innate orientation towards peace (see Dowler 1998; Alison 2004; Ashe 2006; Stapleton and Wilson 2014). The transition towards involvement in CBRJ was not automatic for some of the research participants. While it became an emotive issue for the women during the focus groups, some women said that, some in their community had accepted paramilitary punishment beatings. Participant 2 commented that: 'The punishment beatings emerged from a big void in policing. It was just normal and accepted; it didn't take a fizz out of people.' She continued: 'The young men wore the injury like a badge of honour, they could have been kneecapped one day and the next day they were hanging out a window with their crutches.' She added: 'We were brought up in confined communities and the community was disrupted and harmed by this anti-social behaviour, we just accepted these practices.'

Other research participants stated that they had never accepted violence as a solution to community problems and recalled how they had to be convinced that CBRJ was not 'a cover' for the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA). Participant 3 stated: 'Some of us had to be convinced that it [CBRJ] reflected a real attempt to move beyond the punishment beatings.' In relation to the system of paramilitary justice, Participant 4 reflected that, 'so many mistakes were made; so many families were pulled apart'. She added: 'Our communities deserve a better policy and restorative justice enabled that policy to develop and the community deserved better.' The focus group discussions suggest that these standpoints emerged from different life histories and they show that transitioning from violence through CBRJ practices was not an exclusively male endeavour. Mainstream researchers have argued that ex-combatant men's involvement in violence motivated them to reject it, and encouraged these men to examine alternatives to violence (see McEvoy and Mika 2002). Ignoring women's transitions or assuming an intrinsic attraction to non-violence by all women places women's subjectivities outside of the context of conflict, and therefore, reduces the importance of integrating an analysis of women's transitions within broader structures of communal

transitions. Exposing some women's use of CBRJ to move beyond forms of communal violence that sections of their community had once accepted highlights the importance of recognising that women's shifts from violence to non-violence are rooted in contextual factors as opposed to a universal female orientation towards peace. This makes them part of communal transitions to non-violence, not peripheral to them. As Aretxaga (1995b) observed in an earlier period of Northern Ireland politics: 'The pervasive idea that women are mere victims of the war and naturally oppose it' has acted to obscure 'the complex dynamic through which women become subjects and not mere objects of social transformation.'

That said, given the historical conditions of gender inequality in Northern Ireland that supported male dominance of public arenas, it is not surprising that the men and women involved transited to CBRJ through different routes. However, understanding and detailing women's role in CBRJ disrupts and challenges the valorisation of male agency in the mainstream narrative of CBRJ. CBRJ was not an effect of men's unique experiences of ethno-nationalist violence and resistance to prison authorities as suggested in some of the literature (see Ashe 2009). Women's resistance to accepting conditions within communities during the period of the conflict, their experiences of violence and the skills they developed through community work while combatant men were incarcerated in prisons or on the run from the authorities, were central aspects in the development of CBRJ. Subsequently, any experiential rationale for the moral leadership of ex-combatant men in communities emerging from conflict in Northern Ireland is exposed as a gendered narrative that reflects a very partial analysis of CBRJ work, and one that, unintentionally, operates to legitimate male dominance within transitional ethnonationalist cultures.

Gender, Security and Conflict Transformation

Due to male-centric representations of CBRJ, ex-combatant men have also been viewed as key figures in implementing restorative practices to deal with the problem of troublesome young men who engage in activities such as joyriding and petty theft (see Smyth et al. 2001 for further analysis). As Handrahan (2004, 433) notes the conflict transformational context is so often 'about male power systems, struggles and identity formation.' However, as the schemes developed, women became increasingly involved in mediation processes with young people and, in particular, with young men who were under threat from the paramilitaries. The effects of this work certainly contributed to the statistical drop in paramilitary punishments, as detailed by Mika (2006). Yet, evaluating CBRJ through statistical drops in paramilitary justice, while important, tends to frame CBRJ as a technical solution to the problem of demilitarisation at the community level. Engaging with women's narratives about their CBRJ work provides a different analytical lens that brings into view issues that face young working-class men in communities emerging from conflict, but also provides insights into how the activities of some men and boys in conflict transformational contexts create insecurity for women and girls. The inclusion of these insights contributes to gender sensitising the role of CBRJ in communities and unhinges the analysis of CBRJ from male dominated and statistical accounts of conflict transformational work. As Enloe (2002, 25; see also 2000)

notes, women's needs are likely to be marginalised as they tend to remain invisible in contexts of both ethnic violence and conflict transformation.

The research participants stated that young men were at risk from the paramilitaries because some young men living in conditions of socio-economic deprivation can engage in anti-social activities. The research participants formulated the problem of the paramilitary targeting of young men in familial terms as opposed to individualistic terms that exposed the effect of these practices on women. For example, participant 1 stated that: 'The effects of punishment beatings impacts whole families'. Participant 4 agreed, stating that: 'So many families were destroyed.' There was agreement among the research participants that mothers shoulder the stress and distress of their sons being placed under threat by armed groups. It was clear that mothers have taken the lead in trying to secure mediation for their sons to try to prevent such punishments from being administered: 'We see the mothers coming in with the sons; it's always the mother bringing in her son' (Participant 1). The women detailed the trauma that mothers suffered when their sons were targeted by the paramilitaries. While paramilitary punishments by PIRA have rescinded as the peace process has developed, new armed groups, termed dissidents, have emerged and continue to engage in punishment attacks on young men.

The research participants discussed at length the implications of these attacks for women's security and mental health during the focus groups. They detailed how the system of punishment by 'appointment' impacted on mothers. The research participants highlighted cases of young men being told by dissident groups to go to a particular location at a particular time where a punishment such as a kneecapping would occur. They described how mothers often accompanied their sons, and waited while the punishment was administered. Participant 2 explained that 'on occasions armed men will appear at the front door of the family home and take sons around the corner to shoot them'. The women detailed other cases that involved armed men entering the family home to administer a paramilitary style punishment. In one case, a grandmother was told to take her grandchild upstairs while her son was attacked in a ground floor room by armed men. Participant 4 commented in these situations 'women's only crime is being a mother.' Participant 6 added often the people who have been involved in the attacks are living on the same street. The women outlined the psychological effects of these attacks on the whole family including younger children who were in the home at the time of threats or attacks.

The research participants saw their role in these cases as one in which they would engage with the whole family and in particular with the mother and son. They detailed how the women affected required help to cope with the psychological and emotional effects of these events, and the research participants felt that their experience and position in the community meant that they had an important role in supporting mothers whose sons were under threat commenting that: 'Often women just take their sons to be punished because they feel there is no other alternative' (Participant 2). This inclusion of the experiences of mothers in understanding the effects of punishment attacks on young men means that the focus group participants recognised that individuals are embedded in a network

of relationships and in this case familial relationships. The effects of continued paramilitary activity on women is therefore recognised and addressed through the study participants' work. Arostegui (2013, 535) observes that women offer 'fresh perspectives to peace-building processes, demanding attention to the complex issues of peace and peace-building, and the people involved, rather than to just ceasefires and power sharing'.

For example, while the processes of CBRJ work exposes the effects of dissident activity on mothers, women in those communities, like women in other communities, also experience domestic violence. While CBRJ does not deal with these cases through mediation due to the protocols set down by the state, the research participants stated that they regularly engaged in counselling women who had been so 'broken down' by domestic violence that they needed support to even start to deal with that violence. In general, the whole group saw themselves as providing a resource for women who were experiencing a range of familial problems. In mainstream analyses, where the focus is on the relationship between young men and the paramilitaries or on the transition of paramilitary men to peaceful processes of dispute mediation, the issue of women's security is given little attention. Subsequently, investigating women's conflict transformational work is more than a matter of adding women to the analysis of CBRJ or community security, women's articulation of their practices reformulates conceptions of peace and security in gendered terms.

The Challenges of Context

Previously, the research participants had lines of communication to paramilitary groups. However, as new armed groups who reject the 1998 Agreement have emerged, lines of communication have been much more difficult and, at times, impossible to maintain. The research participants said that there were now so many different armed groups that they were not always able to create the conditions for restorative justice alternatives to punishment attacks. The research participants noted that attempts by CBRJ to try to prevent punishment attacks had become more difficult but they were continuing to identify and develop strategies designed to reduce young people's anti-social behaviour. In the context of socio-economic deprivation and increasing levels of unemployment due to the impact of recession, the research participants stated that young people often had few facilities. The research participants were engaging in a range of additional voluntary work in the community to try to provide drop-in centres and other facilities for young people in the area. The group stated that there was an age-range in which young men were most likely to engage in anti-social activities, and they believed that trying to implement communal supports to steer them through this stage was a central strategy in trying to reduce anti-social behaviour. They agreed that young women, less often targeted by armed groups, also require support and facilitates within the community. However, the problem remains that these women work with a low resource base and this limits the degree of support they can provide for young people at risk in the community.

Their approach to anti-social behaviour, particularly by young people in their communities has affinities with Hudson's concept of 'relationalism'. Hudson

states that 'relationalism recognises individuals as an embodied in a network of relationships which include relationships with community and with the state' (Hudson 2006, 37). Therefore, she argues that notions of responsibility and culpability are also relational. According to this standpoint offending cannot be reduced to simply the level of the individual actors but account must be taken of the social conditions of those who engage in crime, particularly in relation to structures of social disadvantage (see Hudson 1999). Hudson (2006) views the development of relationalism, taking account of the effect of broader social relationships of inequality in restorative practice, as a key aspect in shifting it beyond male definitions of justice that individualise justice, thereby disconnecting justice from broader political structures.

The shape of CBRJ also changed as the schemes developed. Due to the presence of ex-combatants in building the structures of CBRJ and the issues their involvement raised about the appropriateness of ex-combatants delivering restorative justice, strict protocols were developed for the schemes and CBRJ is strictly regulated by the state (Northern Ireland Office 2007). The research participants argued that they were the most regulated organisation in Northern Ireland, and claimed that the protocols were too strict to enable effective restorative solutions from being implemented in various situations. If members of the community contact the schemes to handle a dispute or offence and the case is then handed over to the police due to the stringency of the protocols, then, as the research participants put it: 'We lose community trust'. In addition, the senior management team has sought further accreditation for the schemes through, for example, organisational awards and accreditations. To some degree, the increased professionalism of the schemes acts to offset challenges to the integrity of the schemes. However, the burden of increased professionalism has fallen on women by adding to administration workloads and further regulating their practice.

Furthermore, the research participants were concerned that professionalization within the organisation could potentially distance the schemes from the community. The main focus for the research participants was to support the community and the benefits of accreditation had to be considered against the possibility of increased administration impeding their work. Participant 3 commented that 'even if there was no funding we would still do this work; we were doing it before there was any funding'. The research participants' concerns about the impact of professionalism on the organisation were reflected in its recent promotional material which profiled events and CBRJ personnel rather than community focussed features. Dhami and Joy (2007, 20) argue that it is important that restorative justice programs, 'with their personalising and humanising appeal for participants at all levels, do not become so routine and formal that they lose their flexibility, their vitality, and eventually their effectiveness'. Women's analysis of the drift towards professionalization in the organisation raises the importance of these issues and operates as a point of resistance against the formation of overly bureaucratic structures. Again, it highlights the central importance of supporting and channelling women's influence within these schemes to ensure women's voices and perspectives are not only heard but also directly impact the evolution of these organisations.

Difficulties continue to surround the relationship between CBRJ and women's groups involved in supporting women who have experienced domestic violence. The referral of these cases to the PSNI continues to raise issues for communities still emerging from deep communal violence. The concern of the women's groups has always been that community politics would act as a barrier to police involvement in domestic violence cases (see O'Rourke 2009). The position of CBRJ is that they are often the only agency that women feel they can access support in the community. They pointed out that they organised the first safe room for a woman in Northern Ireland at risk from violence. Moreover, they suggested that often women find that the intervention of police and social workers can escalate the problems. They maintained that there was a general lack of faith in the criminal justice system by women and that meant that they often accessed more local forms of support. However, the schemes' involvement in domestic violence cases remains contentious.

Conclusions

This article has explored women's practices in CBRJ to try to correct the historical record of the development of specific local-level conflict transformational initiatives during the period of conflict transformation through the application of a feminist analytical lens. By challenging male-centred analyses that have placed men at the forefront of accounts of conflict transformational processes at both the macro and micro-level in Northern Ireland, this article has exposed how recognising and including women's activities in analyses of conflict transformation initiatives highlights how women's experiences of the conflict and the skills that they developed during this period were vital in its 'rolling out'.

Moreover, it has mapped women's transitions to CBRJ by locating women's experiences within the context of violence forcing recognition of women as located within the Northern Ireland conflict; a recognition that challenges the theoretical or empirical occlusion of women from the building of peace. This article has also exposed the important ways that women's involvement in local-level practices of conflict transformation expands traditional formulations of peace, justice and security highlighting not only women's contribution to the development of micro-level conflict transformational practice but also the continuing ways that women's security and wellbeing are affected by the legacies of the conflict which encompasses the failure of some groups to demilitarise. Given the continuing dominance of men in formal politics and their increasing influence over aspects of community politics there is an urgent need to highlight where and how women are involved in conflict transformational activities in the region. This article has explored one dimension of that conflict transformational work by gendering the account of the development of the CBRJ practices that emerged as alternatives to paramilitary forms of justice in Northern Ireland. As men continue to encroach onto the peace-making terrain in Northern Ireland, it is vital that we continue to view peace-making as a gendered terrain.

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Notes

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2. Hereafter the Agreement.

3. In 2006–7 the St. Andrews Agreement resulted in Sinn Fein agreeing to support the Police Service (Legislation.gov.uk 2007).

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